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MORE-THAN-HUMAN FUTURES: TOWARDS A RELATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN/OF THE ANTHROPOCENE

Gisela Welz

The term ›anthropocene‹ started its career as a proposal to name the current epoch in the history of our planet, an epoch in which the impact of human activity exceeds that of any other biophysical force. While the determination of valid evidence to identify this tipping point in geohistory remains contested, the anthropocene has turned into a concept widely acknowledged far beyond the geosciences. As diverse publics are made aware of mankind's destructive potential and the possible future of an unliveable earth, the term ›anthropocene‹ is also acquiring a morally charged, political salience. The scientist credited with inventing the term, Paul Crutzen, indeed argued for the ethical implications of the concept, demanding that humanity should accept its responsibility for the safekeeping of the earth.[1] The term appears to capture well our growing awareness of and indeed profound unease at, »the recently emerging scope and scale of [human disturbance to the geophysical earth] and its threats to multispecies life«, as anthropologist Anna Tsing asserts.[2] Tsing, together with Heather Ann Swanson, Nils Bubandt and Elaine Gan[3], all four of them members of the Aarhus University's Research in the Anthropocene program, published the remarkable anthology ›Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Stories from the Anthropocene‹.[4] They observed that »the Anthropocene not only marks a geologic time, but also a scholarly one – a moment when a particular term has captivated scholarly imaginations.«[5] They suggested that for anthropology, the advent of the anthropocene concept is nothing less than a paradigm shift. In a similar vein, Bruno Latour, in his

1 *Paul J. Crutzen/Eugene F. Stoermer:* The ›Anthropocene‹. In: Global Change Newsletter 41 (2000), pp. 17–18.

2 *Anna Tsing:* AURA's Openings: Unintentional Design in the Anthropocene. In: Aarhus University Research on the Anthropocene (AURA): More Than Human. AURA working papers 1 (2017), pp. 43–53, here p. 43. URL: http://anthropocene.au.dk/fileadmin/Anthropocene/Workingpapers/AURA_workingpaperVol1_01.pdf (Accessed: 12. 2. 2018).

3 Elaine Gan had been invited as a plenary speaker at the conference, but unfortunately could not take part.

4 *Anna Tsing/Heather Swanson/Elaine Gan/Nils Bubandt* (eds.): Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene. Minneapolis 2017.

5 *Heather Anne Swanson/Nils Bubandt/Anna Tsing:* Less Than One But More Than Many: Anthropocene as Science Fiction and Scholarship-in-the-Making. In: Environment and Society: Advances in Research 6 (2015), pp. 149–166, here p. 149. See also *Anna Tsing:* The Mushroom at the End of the World. On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins. Princeton 2015.

distinguished lecture at the *American Anthropologists Association* in Washington D.C. in 2014, argued that »it is as a moral character that human agency is entering the geostory of the Anthropocene« precisely because »the human agent has grown to the dimension of a natural phenomenon (…) but it has not become more natural for all of that«.[6] Latour claimed then that the Anthropocene »brings together three features fairly familiar to anthropologists – the concentration on human agency; the necessity to tackle again the connection between what used to be called ›physical‹ and ›cultural‹ anthropology and the reopening of the key question of what is common and what is specific in the various ways of inhabiting the earth.«[7] Heather Swanson and her colleagues also emphasized that »the term carries high hopes, not only for long-overdue attention to global environmental problems, but also for a much-longed-for break in the wall that has separated the human and natural sciences .«[8] And indeed, anthropologists are increasingly addressing

> »the entanglement of things natural and things social [by] probing into the co-constitution of species, of animate and inanimate elements, of social and biological potentialities, of human and other life forms. Along such fault-lines, new worlds emerge as objects of anthropological interest,«

as Kirsten Hastrup put it in the introduction to ›Anthropology and Nature‹.[9] Such new worlds have been charted by anthropologists such as Tim Ingold (2013) and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2016 with Déborah Danowski) and, of course, are being eloquently evoked by Donna Haraway (2015) and Philippe Descola (2013).[10]

This has also led to another conceptual innovation, namely the joining of nature and culture – both in the plural – in a new composite term ›NaturesCultures‹. NaturesCultures combines two concepts that in Western societies are viewed as belonging to two distinct, clearly separate domains of knowledge. The new term does not imply that these two are no longer discernible but wants to draw attention to new

6 *Bruno Latour:* Anthropology at the Time of the Anthropocene. Distinguished Lecture at the 2014 American Anthropological Association meeting. Washington, D.C. 2014. URL: http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/139-AAA-Washington.pdf (Accessed: 7.2.2018).

7 Ibid.

8 *Swanson et al.*, as in fn 5, p. 150.

9 *Kirsten Hastrup:* Anthropology on the Edge. In: Id. (ed.): Anthropology and Nature. Abingdon 2013, pp. 1–26, here p. 9.

10 *Tim Ingold:* Designing Environments for Life. In: Kirsten Hastrup (ed.): Anthropology and Nature. Abingdon 2013, pp. 233–246; *Eduardo Viveiros de Castro/Déborah Danowski:* The Ends of the World. Malden/Cambridge 2016; *Donna J. Haraway:* Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin. In: Environmental Humanities 6 (2015), pp. 159–165; *Philippe Descola:* Beyond Nature and Culture. Chicago 2013.

relationships engendered between spheres that we could once in an uncomplicated way consider simply cultural and natural, but can do so no more today. Like the term anthropocene, NaturesCultures is not really a very recent arrival on our discursive horizon, but it is only now unfolding its potential to shape our research imagination. First of all, it motivates anthropologists to inquire into amalgamations and multiple linkages between the natural and the cultural that irritate our sense of how nature and culture are clearly demarcated from each other. The genealogy of the concept that comes in a number of versions again makes us reconsider Bruno Latour's 1991 essay »We have never been modern«[11] – where he asserted that the moderns are insisting on and indeed re-erecting the boundary between nature and culture while at the same time constantly producing hybrid amalgamations of nature and culture, as well as Donna Haraway and her Companion Species Manifesto (2003) that spoke of emergent >naturecultures< and – this also being an important conceptual turn – evoked a new multispecies anthropology, the study of humans and nonhumans in their interrelatedness.[12] Indeed, in order to adequately address environmental problems, climate change and biodiversity issues, but also concerns of mankind's health and nutrition, the social sciences and the humanities cannot limit their scope to looking at human beings, and cultural meanings and social practices exclusively. Anthropology that once was called >the human science< is on its way to becoming a more-than-human concern.[13]

11 *Bruno Latour:* We have never been modern. Cambridge 1993.

12 *Donna J. Haraway:* The Companion Species Manifesto. Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness. Chicago 2003. See also *Thom Van Dooren/Eben Kirksey/Ursula Münster:* Multispecies Studies: Cultivating Arts of Attentiveness. In: Environmental Humanities 8 (2016), issue 1, pp. 1–23.

13 So, when you say >NaturesCultures<, you do not take nature as a given, nor do you understand culture to be a discursively constructed domain, and what's more you do not expect that both categories are easily and unproblematically distinct. Rather, the transfers, boundary work and interactions between both domains move into focus and the conviction that nature and culture have always have been mutually constitutive. Donna Haraway and Bruno Latour were already mentioned as key figures in this. But more generally, marxist, feminist and poststructuralist inquiries started to highlight the entanglements between knowledge, its producers, and societal interests and power relations since the 1970s, and Science Studies became one of the main approaches to critique scientific knowledge production about nature. This was not solely about the validity of truth claims and the assertions of disinterestedness and neutrality, but STS scholars inquired into the >how< of knowledge production, homing in on the very practices, the sociotechnical forms of action that make up what we call >research< across the disciplines. For these and other in-depth insights into the genealogy and varied meanings of the term >Naturenkulturen<, I am much indebted to Friederike Gesing, Katrin Amelang and Michi Knecht.

What does the anthropocene entail for German-language European ethnology?

So far, I have mostly quoted the international protagonists of Anthropocene Anthropology. The transfer of conceptual innovations from English-language anthropology into German-language Europäische Ethnologie continues to be one of my personal long-term concerns. But why did I choose to do it in English? European ethnology counts as one of the minor academic traditions within the broader arena of world anthropologies, partly, because the majority of publications are in the respective national language – in German in our case – and have less visibility internationally. For this reason, the scholarly association of European ethnologists, the *German Society for Folklore Studies*, is currently making a pronounced effort to change this situation. It is encouraging English-language contributions to conferences and publications, yet, at the same time, remaining critical of the hegemonic position of UK- and US-dominated world anthropologies. This association has also started an English-language scholarly journal JEECA – *Journal of European Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology* –, alongside the German-language *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde*, taking into account that, for linguistically discrete national academic discourses to become mutually intelligible, more than simple translations of texts are necessary.

In Europe, the disciplinary landscape of anthropology is far from uniform. The names of academic disciplines, their boundaries, and their designated domains of scholarly inquiry differ from one country to the next, sometimes even between individual universities and research institutions. A closer look, however, reveals some remarkably consistent patterns. A split emerged in the 19th century, resulting in two separate anthropological disciplines co-existing in academic teaching and research. On the one hand, national ethnologies emerged in individual countries which »contributed to the cultural homogenization process of each nation«,[14] embodied in the »the study of folklore and folk music, customs and costumes, housing and handicraft as they existed in peasant society«.[15] On the other hand, academic interest in the cultures of so-called primitive peoples and premodern peasant societies coalesced in the formation of research programmes that during the 20th century grew into a more general, often comparatively oriented anthropology. The names given to these two branches of the anthropological enterprise differed according to national languages from country to country. Because the bifurcation appears to have been most strongly

14 *Jonas Frykman:* A Tale of Two Disciplines: European Ethnology and the Anthropology of Europe. In: Ullrich Kockel/Máiréd Nic Craith/Jonas Frykman (eds.): A Companion to the Anthropology of Europe. Malden/Oxford/Chichester 2012, pp. 572–589, here p. 578.

15 *Tomas Gerholm/Ulf Hannerz:* Introduction: The Shaping of National Anthropologies. In: Ethnos 47 (1982), issue 1–2, pp. 5–35, here p. 22.

articulated in the German speaking countries, however, it has been labelled the >Volkskunde/Voelkerkunde split<[16] even in English-language histories of the disciplines.

Folklore and folklife studies dedicated to the philology and history of national and regional cultures existed in most of Eastern, Central and Northern Europe. Because these were the precursors of contemporary European ethnologists, their scholarly society has been holding on on to the time-honoured if contested name *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Volkskunde – German Society for Folklore Studies* – with what I would call a mixture of shame and defiance. Fewer and fewer of the university institutes and programmes in which our members teach, study, do research and disseminate their knowledge for audiences outside of the academy are still called institutes for >Volkskunde<, but have adopted new names. The rejection of the old Volkskunde designation signalled a theoretical paradigm shift and was a political turning point, leaving behind the politically conservative, often at least latently nationalist research agenda.[17] Since the 1960s, the striving for a new rationale for the discipline had been animated by the need to come clear of any associations with the Nazi past that had haunted the discipline since the end of World War II.[18]

So, what does the anthropocene entail for German-language European ethnology, a fairly small organisation within the increasingly globalized, yet asymmetrically structured academic field of anthropology? In the abstract announcing my talk, I claimed that European ethnology – and its sibling orientations that go by other names – are well-positioned to take up the challenges associated with this paradigm shift.[19] For

16 Ibid.

17 *Regina Bendix:* In Search of Authenticity. The Formation of Folklore Studies. Madison 1997; *Gisela Welz:* Ethnology. In: James D. Wright (ed.): International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences. Vol. 1–26, Oxford [2]2015, here volume 8, Oxford [2]2015, pp. 198–202.

18 The sheer diversity of labels that institutes have chosen to replace Volkskunde or to qualify the term is overwhelming. Many have chosen composite terms and created a sort of hyphenated Volkskunde. European ethnology is by far the most frequent ingredient in this mix. Many of the university institutions of our (some call it >post-Volkskunde<) disciplinary orientation – nine out of more than twenty – have also opted for Cultural Anthropology or some combination thereof as a name and as a mission, some of as early as the 1970s. For a long time, this went unchallenged. But two years ago, the extra European anthropologists in Germany decided by majority to change the name of their disciplinary association which went by the label *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Völkerkunde*. Now their scholarly association's name is *German Society for Cultural and Social Anthropology* which makes for perplexed responses from anybody – including university presidents – who is not familiar with the complicated prehistory of the Volkskunde – Völkerkunde divide. In an attempt to escape from this quandary, European ethnologists are currently casting a poll in search of a new name, to be followed by public debates within their professional association during the year 2021.

19 For instance *Ina Dietzsch:* Klimawandel. Kulturanthropologische Perspektiven darauf, wie ein abstrakter Begriff erfahrbar gemacht wird. In: Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde 113 (2017), issue 1, pp. 21–39.

sure, there are earlier approaches in European ethnology that resonate with the more recent interest in more-than-human socialities and environment-human relations. We cannot talk about anthropocene anthropology within the framework of German European ethnology without acknowledging the earlier contributions by colleagues, colleagues who are no longer among us. So, in the following, I am attempting to keep alive the memory of two of them.

First of all, I stand here as a student of Ina-Maria Greverus and as a professor at the *Frankfurt Institute of Cultural Anthropology*, which she founded in 1974. She passed away two years ago at age 87. Her much-debated and often contested notion of >human ecology< dates back to the 1970s, but went on to influence later generations of researchers in our discipline whose pre-occupation was – and in some cases continues to be – with man-environment relations. In her writings on cultural ecology in 1970s Germany, Ina-Maria Greverus asserted that the term >environment< comprises both the natural and the man-made, and that culture needs to be considered both the product and the process of humans who are collectively interacting with their environment.[20] Greverus was among the first scholars in the humanities in postwar Germany who dared to link ethnological research in modern societies with fundamental issues of biophysical anthropology.[21] Her pioneering work on patterns of human territoriality, however, did not build on earlier and problematic German intellectual tradition, but took its inspiration from cultural ecology, then a fairly new subfield of anthropology that emerged in the 1960s in the United States. There, cultural anthropologists such as John Bennett and Julian Steward[22] started developing new perspectives on man as a biological species and on human-environment relations already in mid-twentieth century. They were trying to bridge the chasm that was opening between anthropology as a general science of human existence and the ethnographic studies of local life-worlds that increasingly became the hallmark of anthropology. For Ina-Maria Greverus this emerging anthropological subfield, variously

20 *Ina-Maria Greverus:* Der territoriale Mensch: Ein literaturanthropologischer Versuch zum Heimatphänomen. Königstein/Taunus 1972; *Ina-Maria Greverus:* Kulturökologische Aufgaben im Analyse- und Planungsbereich Gemeinde. In: Id. (ed.): Auf der Suche nach Heimat. Munich 1979, pp. 212–223.

21 *Gisela Welz:* Mensch-Umwelt-Beziehungen. Zur Gegenstandskonstruktion der Frankfurter Kulturökologie. In: Gisela Welz/Antonia Davidovic-Walther/Anke S. Weber (eds.): Epistemische Orte: Gemeinde und Region als Forschungsformate. Frankfurt-on-Main 2011 (= Kulturanthropologie Notizen, vol. 80), pp. 197–209; *Gisela Welz:* Environmental Orientations and the Anthropology of the Anthropocene. In: Anthropological Journal of European Cultures 27 (2018), issue 1, pp. 40–44.

22 *John Bennett:* The Ecological Transition. Cultural Anthropology and Human Adaptation. New York 1976; *Julian H. Steward:* The Concept and Method of Cultural Ecology. In: Jane C. Steward/Robert F. Murphy (eds.): Evolution and Ecology. Essays on Social Transformation. Urbana, Illinois 1977, pp. 43–57.

called human ecology or cultural ecology, became an important influence. Cultural ecologists conceptualize culture as the specifically human style of adaptation to environmental conditions that enables human populations to survive. When John Bennett in 1976 coined the term ›ecological transition‹ to conceptualize the »progressive incorporation of Nature into human frames of purpose and action«, this implied a vocal critique of environmental deterioration effected by industrialization and urbanization and the threat of over-exploitation and depletion of natural resources.[23] But as I would like to add, cultural ecology was in many ways unlike Anthropocene Anthropology, for one thing, it did uphold and indeed reinforce the very dichotomies that Anthropocene Anthropology is interrogating and doing away with.

Secondly, I want to call your attention to Stefan Beck's work and his anticipation of Anthropocene Anthropology. He proposed to develop a Relational Anthropology that would integrate the humanities and the sciences, and particularly forge a link between ethnography and the life sciences while building on the specific epistemic legacies of European ethnology and its precursors. Stefan passed away in 2015. As his long-time companion, colleague and collaborator, my account of his contribution is of course colored with admiration, adulation, love – but who is to say that academic endeavor should be free of emotion or indeed of deep affection? Most in any case will agree with me that he was a pioneer, among other things introducing the Science and Technology Studies research agenda into our discipline. He insisted that European Ethnologists should become literate in the natural sciences, and especially in biomedicine and genetics, but by the same token, he requires us to remain aware of the disciplinary histories of Volkskunde and the medical professions and use them productively. He did so in the 2008 inaugural lecture as a newly appointed professor at Humboldt University. The lecture was titled. »Natur | Kultur. Überlegungen zu einer relationalen Anthropologie«. It was initially published in the *Zeitschrift* für *Volkskunde,* and has very recently been reprinted in a special issue of the *Berliner Blätter* dedicated to his work, called ›After Practice. Thinking through Matter(s) and Meaning Relationally‹.[24]

Even though he knew the Latour essay well and was familiar also with Haraway's writings, he chose to introduce the problematic signaled by the dual term nature | culture in a way that grew out of his own research concerns with the cultural malleability of bodily functions and medical disorders, with, as he put it succinctly, the problem of »how culture gets under the skin«,[25] and how human beings' biologies are not

23 *Bennett*, as in fn 22.

24 *Stefan Beck:* Natur/Kultur. Überlegungen zur einer relationalen Anthropologie. In: Zeitschrift für Volkskunde 104 (2008), pp. 161–199; *Stefan Beck:* Natur/Kultur. Überlegungen zur einer relationalen Anthropologie (Wiederabdruck). In: Berliner Blätter 81 (2019), pp. 100–139.

25 *Jörg Niewöhner/Christoph Kehl/Stefan Beck* (eds.): Wie geht Kultur unter die Haut? Emergente Praxen an der Schnittstelle von Medizin, Lebens- und Sozialwissenschaft. Bielefeld 2008.

separate from their social practices and the cultural cosmologies that inform them. In doing so, he did not shy away from the conceptual challenge of evolutionary thinking, as most of his contemporaries did, but took it up to acknowledge the co-evolution between human groups and their environments. Genetic and epigenetic processes, metabolic dynamics, as well as emergent interactions between predisposition and exposition interested him, as did the moral effects and cultural reverberations of scientific facts and artefacts such as genetic test results or epidemiological population data. This is what he then proceeded to call a >relational anthropology<[26] – relating those domains of knowledge and research in the human sciences that had largely been separate for almost one hundred years. The concept of a relational anthropology for him did not only entail that nature and culture are addressed symmetrically, taking into account biologies, socialities, and materialities alike, and looking at the entanglements of ecological and cultural processes. The relational anthropology proposed by Stefan Beck was equally intended to engender a new pragmatics and politics of research that he and his colleagues and students called >co-laborative<. Formerly separate domains of expert knowledge and research agendas ought to be brought into close cooperation, as the influence of social and cultural factors on physiological processes can only be addressed by members of distinct disciplines working alongside each other within a joint framework of inquiry.[27]

The inspiration provided by Stefan Beck's work and his commitment to interrogating the divide between nature and culture has also been taken up elsewhere in European ethnology in Germany. A notable example is the *NaturesCultures Lab* founded at the *Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Studies at the University of Bremen*. This is a platform for research and exchange with colleagues from other disciplines. Last year, the lab published an edited volume of seminal contributions to the Anthropology of the Anthropocene, titled »NaturenKulturen. Denkräume und Werkzeuge für neue politische Ökologien«. With this volume, Michi Knecht and her Bremen colleagues[28]

26 Stefan Beck did not adopt the natureculture discourse of Haraway but did refer to Latour, even though he was among the first in European ethnology in Germany to read their books. He did take up – in the printed version of the inaugural lecture – Latour's assertion that the purification measures of so-called >modern thinking<, keeping nature and society neatly compartmentalized, kept us from looking at the prevalent hybridisations of culturalized nature and naturalized culture. Stefan Beck took off from there, to sketch out how the biosciences could benefit from anthropological knowledge and vice versa.

27 At Humboldt University Berlin, this approach has evolved into the Laboratory: Anthropology of Environment | Human Relations. How anthropologists engage in co-laboratories with other disciplines was also illustrated in the panel >Ethnografische Theorie kollaborativ fügen< koorganized by the laboratory at the conference (see Panel E this volume).

28 Friederike Gesing, Michi Knecht, Katrin Amelang, – European ethnologists prominently engaged in Science and Technology Studies in Germany – as well as human geographer Michael Flitner selected articles originally published in English and had them translated into German,

to my mind mark a turning point in the way the Anthropology of the Anthropocene is being regarded in European ethnology: this is no longer something we import from abroad and attempt to replicate, but rather, the Bremen NaturesCultures volume advertises a confident move towards developing an independent German voice in the arena of STS-informed ecological anthropology. In this vein, they declare NaturesCultures to be what we call a >Denkraum< in German, a space that allows for new ways of thinking. This Denkraum takes its cues from such diverse origins as political ecology, environmental humanities, Science and Technology Studies (in particular, its more recent feminist, postcolonial, ethnographic and collaborative varieties) as well as innovative research programs that are emerging in a number of disciplines such as >more-than-human geographies<, >multispecies ethnography<, >ontological politics< and >anthropocene anthropology<.

Of course, the Bremen initiative is just one example of newly established organisations and collaborations within our discipline and – importantly – in cooperation with other disciplines. In addition, this development is evident in the emergence of multispecies studies in European ethnology. Multispecies anthropology does not just address our companion species that have evolved with us in the history of mankind, but also what in English fittingly is called >wildlife<. Some European ethnologists' fascination with the return of the wolves to Western Europe and the discourses and policies that are generated by it are widely known[29] Multispecies anthropology, however, also looks at the intricate relations between humans and bacteria, the specific microbiopolitics that have evolved in the production of foods and drink such as cheese or beer and of course also the role of insects and mammals for the transmission of infectious diseases. All of these have been important research areas for anthropologists in the multispecies field.

To finish, I would like to come back to the inception of the term anthropocene. For European ethnology as a discipline that has been preoccupied with the social transformations brought about by industrialization and urbanization, that has been inquiring into the cultural bases and social impacts of technological and economic

to make them more accessible to audiences in European ethnology and other disciplines in the German language countries. Among the authors featured, there are Anna Tsing, Emily Yates-Doerr, Jamie Lorimer, Sarah Whatmore, Heather Paxson and Steve Hinchcliffe as well as other international scholars, many of them having collaborated with the Bremen researchers in recent years. The volume also contains a number of original articles by early career researchers from European ethnology who are combining STS and Anthropocene Anthropology in their doctoral and postdoctoral research.

29 In particular, Bernhard Tschofen, Michaela Fenske and Irina Arnold (see this volume), among others, have researched along those lines. *Michaela Fenske/Bernhard Tschofen* (in print) (eds.): Managing the Return of the Wild: Human Encounters with Wolves in Europe. Also, the *Museum am Rothenbaum Kulturen und Künste der Welt MARKK* – the Hamburg ethnographic museum was showing the exhibit »Von Wölfen und Menschen« at the time of the conference.

change, and has engaged critically with the ways in which our physical bodies and our subjectivities are shaped by scientific expertise, the concept of the anthropocene makes sense in an almost self-evident way. By the same token, it allows for conceptualizing so-called >anthropogenic changes< of our planet – evidenced by endangered biodiversity, the dramatic decrease of insects and birds, the massive pollution of huge areas of the oceans by plastic garbage and microplastics, and of course, climate change and global warming as the most acute concerns that move many of us to change our patterns of consumption and to take political action. All of these can only be tackled when their complex interdependencies with worldviews, cultural assumptions and social dispositions are addressed.

Yet, we also need to realize that while we speak of living in the anthropocene, its formal definition by the authorized international bodies in the geosciences is still to happen. While it is largely agreed upon that the Anthropocene should be acknowledged as a geoscientifically defined epoch, there is no consensus about which stratigraphic evidence or which date should serve as an agreed-upon marker for the end of the Holocene, the period in geohistory that is ongoing as we speak. The Anthropocene Working Group of the Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy of the *International Commission on Stratigraphy* is one of the bodies that has to determine the status of the anthropocene proposal. Physical geographer Mark Maslin, one of its members, pointed to the intricacies and indeed major differences in whether a stratigraphic evidence or a certain event is chosen, and also whether the beginning of the observable change or rather its peak is used for defining an epoch in geohistory. He did so in a discussion with human geographer Andrew Barry, which was published in the journal *Geography and Environment*, while the latter asserted that »there is an urgent need to think not just about the concept of the anthropocene but also about processes through which it is formally defined«.[30] He warned that our enthusiasm and indeed, our facile adoption of the anthropocene concept may short-circuit important and timely inquiries. Who defines the anthropocene how and with what authority and to what ends – these, as he implies, are inquiries that the anthropology of knowledge as well as Science and Technology Studies actually are well positioned for. Andrew Barry hastened to add that such inquiries do not imply to recast the Anthropocene in relativist terms nor to negate the massive threat that human activity poses the continued survival of life on earth. Rather, »If they are to be accepted, accounts of the Anthropocene have to be understood as constructs of historically contingent forms of scientific practice, not merely as social constructs or ideological projections«.[31] And this is definitely a task that to my mind, European ethnology should set itself to tackle.

30 *Andrew Barry/Mark Maslin:* The Politics of the Anthropocene: A Dialogue. In: Geo: Geography and Environment 3 (2016), issue 2, pp. 1–12, here p. 8.

31 Ibid.

Inquiring into European ethnology's scope in the 21st century allows us to reflect on the divergent disciplinary developments that make up the academic landscape of global anthropologies.[32] Anthropologies, then, are not a universal endeavor. Rather, they represent a number of historically contingent projects infused with hegemonic power and national interests. However, they are also able to generate innovative energy and political critique. Debates about the anthropocene challenge anthropology – anthropology understood as a disciplinary formation that includes European ethnology – to reposition itself not only vis-à-vis other disciplines in the sciences and humanities, but in a more general way, as a knowledge-making enterprise within the episteme of (late) modernity. This enterprise is being called upon not only to be able to explain how the present emerged from the past. Rather, we are increasingly also called upon to develop prognostic skills and forecast possible futures for humanity.

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32 *Gustovo Lins Ribeiro/Arturo Escobar* (eds.): World Anthropologies: Disciplinary Transformations within Systems of Power. New York 2006.